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# *the Sea Swallow*



BEING THE ANNUAL REPORT  
OF THE ROYAL NAVAL  
BIRD WATCHING SOCIETY

Published December, 1956

# ROYAL NAVAL BIRD WATCHING SOCIETY.

(Affiliated to the British Trust for Ornithology)

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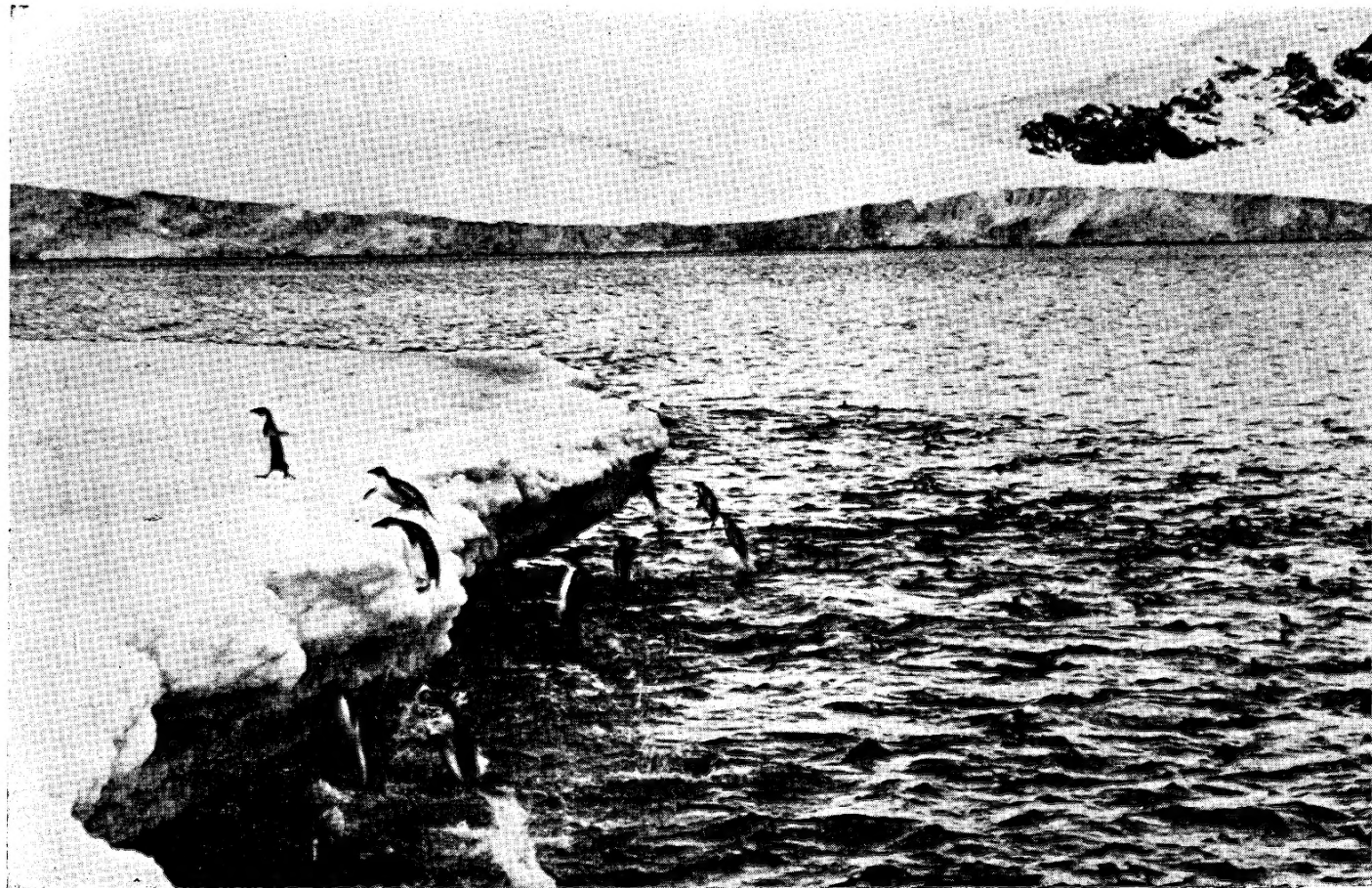
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ADELIE PENGUINS COMING IN TO THEIR ROOKERY FROM SEA—ANTARCTICA.

*(Reproduced by kind permission of the F.I.D. Sc. Bureau).*

## FOREWORD

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1956 marks a step forward in the R.N.B.W.S. by the inclusion of all ranks of Her Majesty's Merchant Navy to full membership. The inclusion of the Merchant Navy not only provides a further bond of friendship between our Navies, but opens up a far greater field of opportunity in the observation of birds on the oceans.

I welcome new members and hope that they will get others to join our Society.

The first Sea Passage Bird Lists have now been issued to the reference libraries of H.M. Ships. I am glad to hear that one of our well known Shipping Companies is ordering copies for the libraries of its fleet. The idea is still in its infancy, but every sea report received will help to provide data for further lists, which in turn will I am sure prove to be a valuable contribution to our knowledge of birds.

A channel for the study of reports of land birds observed at sea appears in this report; I hope that members will take full advantage of forwarding land bird reports. Meantime many members must needs serve ashore, and their reports are equally welcome.

I would like to pay a special tribute to Captain Tuck, Commander Hamond, and Commander Smith for their untiring efforts which have made R.N.B.W.S. such a success, besides the many contributors who have sent in reports.

*Lashlan Yashuntosh of Yashuntosh*

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MOY HALL, MOY,  
INVERNESSHIRE.

*November, 1956.*

## EDITORIAL

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I wish to place on record the great assistance which Commander C. E. Hamond, D.S.O., D.S.C. \*, R.N., has rendered to the Society during the past year in undertaking the plotting and analysis of Sea Reports, and handling the inflow of correspondence. Through work in connection with the Trans-Antarctic Expedition I have been unable to give adequate time to this work. The final editing of this report reflects much preparatory work carried out by Commander Hamond.

### STATE OF SOCIETY.

The addition of thirty-two new members in 1956, mainly from members in the Merchant Navy, is a very welcome stimulus to our small society. Our members are only one hundred and seventy-three. With greater numbers not only could the valuable information we already receive from members be greatly expanded, but a healthier bank balance would allow more scope for disseminating information. At the time of going to press our balance in hand is £60 which leaves little to veer and haul on.

May I remind members, and particularly new members, that subscriptions are due on 1st January yearly, and the adoption of Banker's Orders is a great help to the Society.

### SEA PASSAGE BIRD LISTS.

Bound copies of the first four lists are now available in reference libraries of H.M. ships. Details concerning individual copies appear in R.N.B.W.S. Bulletins.

Sixty-three copies of lists 1, 2, and 4 have been bought by the P. and O. Steam Navigation Company for supply to their fleet.

Further lists covering the North Atlantic Passage from U.K. to U.S.A. East Coast Ports and to the Gulf of St. Lawrence are in preparation.

### H.M. YACHT BRITANNIA—ROYAL CRUISE.

We are greatly indebted to Dr. R. A. Falla, Director of the Dominion Museum, Wellington, New Zealand, and R.N.B.W.S. representative in New Zealand, for his kind offer to supply the Royal Yacht with an illustrated guide to the sea birds likely to be seen in the Southern Oceans between New Zealand and Cape Horn during the voyages in these oceans.

Time has been very short for the preparation of these notes, and we hope that "Britannia" will receive them in time.

G. S. TUCK.  
(1/10/56).

## SEA REPORTS

There have been some excellent sea reports this year including a number from previous contributors.

Many of the most extensive and valuable are from Merchant Navy officers who have such unrivalled opportunities. Now that they are eligible for membership, many having already joined the Society, it is hoped that this source of supply will increase.

A lot of repetition is inevitable especially on the more frequented routes but reports are still valuable as they enable the recorders to study the fluctuations of bird population in various months. They also enable independent reports to be checked against each other.

The most memorable work comes once again from Captain P. P. O. Harrison of M.V. "Cambridge." He sends us a log of a voyage from U.K. to New Zealand and return via Panama Canal. This comprises 55 sheets and 299 observations—and incidently it took some plotting!

Captain Harrison's knowledge of the order *Tubinares* must be very considerable, and his identifications are rendered more convincing by the fact that if he has the slightest doubt he records his observation as "uncertain."

It is interesting to note that he observed Ring-billed gulls perching on the heads of Brown Pelicans in the hope of a "rake-off." This act was shown in our 1955 Christmas Card except that the gulls in that case were Laughing Gulls.

The report shows clearly what a host of birds inhabit the South Pacific to the Eastward of New Zealand. It also brings home the great difficulty of identifying Terns at sea. There is no temptation for these birds to approach the ship and identification depends on a very close view. Captain Harrison's list includes 87 species—a very valuable contribution.

Lieut.-Cdr. G. S. Willis, R.N.R. of M.V. "British Union" sends us several reports which are made out with the accuracy we have come to expect from him.

First is a report of a voyage from Dakar to Curacao and Rotterdam in February and March. This provides a check on previous reports from these areas, but produces little new information except the surprising presence of a Kittiwake in Lat, 11 deg. 54 min. N., Long. 55, 49 W, not far outside the Carribean, and not previously reported from this area. His notes show the difficulty of distinguishing at sea between the Manx Shearwater (*P. puffinus*) and Andobons' (*P. cherminieri*) in an area where both may be expected.

Willis follows up with two reports of voyages from Mexico to U.K. in June/July and Aug./Sept., 1955. A noted item is the Northern Phalarope (*L. lobatus*) in 48.30 N, 9.55 W. He also saw Phalaropes (*s.p.*) in 35 N, 62 W, and in 43.15 N, 29.30 W.

His next report comes from Bombay Harbour and a trip round to Calcutta in January, 1956. At Bombay large numbers of Black-headed Gulls were present which included *L. ridibundus* and *L. brunicephalus*. This gave a good chance to compare the wing patterns of the two species. Also in the harbour were Yellow-legged Gulls (*L. cachinans*) and probably Lesser Black-backed (*L. fuscus*) and Great Black-headed (*L. ichthyaetus*). Little was seen around the coasts of India and Ceylon except a few Indian Black-headed Gulls, and there was almost a complete absence of birds in the Bay of Bengal. In the sea reaches of the River Hoogly the Great Black-headed Gull was much in evidence; also some very large Terns with reddish orange beaks which he notes as "probably Caspian." and which were almost certainly of this species.

These reports have been plotted on the world chart and are a valuable addition to our records.

Captain A. J. F. Colquhoun, M.V. "Elysia," Anchor Line, sends us full reports of the following voyages:—

Glasgow to New York (6th-13th Feb., 1956); Baltimore to Avonmouth (26th Feb. to 6th March); Glasgow to New York (20th to 27th March) and Baltimore to Swansea (12th to 21st April). These comprise in all some 153 observations. Comparing these with the chart we find that they agree largely with previous notes. As a result of this we are commencing to prepare a Sea Passage List from U.K. to Eastern Seaboard of U.S.A.

The most notable item in Colquhoun's report is that of 2,000 to 3,000 Little Auks in Lat. 44.17 N, Long. 48.20 W, on 25th March, 1956. Compare this with a record from T. B. Scott, "S.S. Laurentia" who reports "numerous Little Auks on 15th April, 1956 in Lat. 49.20 N, 42.28 W, and again on 16th April in 47.20 N, 47.18 W."

Mr. T. B. Scott contributes excellent reports of two voyages from Glasgow to Montreal and back in April/May and May/June, 1956. He notes that the usual coastal birds generally disappear off Tory Island, occasionally Great Black-backed Gulls stay to 200-400 miles out—Fulmars and Kittiwakes then take over. Arrival in Gulf of St. Lawrence brings notes of Greater Scaup (*Nyroca marila*), American Golden-eye (*Glancionetta claugula am*), Canadian Geese (*Branta canadensis*).

Two Great Shearwaters (*P. gravis*) in 52.15 N, 34.30 W on 14th April are an early record.

Two Song Sparrows (*Melospiza melodia*) came on board in the Gulf of St. Lawrence on 27th April and stayed till 30th April in 50°N, 42°W. As he reported 50 Long-tailed Skuas, 4 Great Skuas and a Pomarine on that day their fate cannot be in much doubt! A very careful and good report.



Two further reports for July and August, 1956 have recently been received.

Able Seaman R. Gibbs of H.M.S. "Mounts Bay" sends an excellent report which strikes quite a new note. He deals with a visit to the Southern Chile coast in October 1955, including the Patagonian Strait and the Gulf of Penas. He records a large colony of Black-browed Albatross (*T. M. richmondi*) breeding on an island; also tremendous numbers of Hornby's Storm Petrel (*O. hornbyi*) and Magellan Diving Petrel (*Pelecanoides magellani*). Over 100 Cinamon Skuas (*Catharacta chilensis*) followed the ship, chasing off Southern Black-backed Gulls (*L. dominicanus*), and some even took scraps from the hand.

To continue his list; Humbolt Penguin, Southern Oyster Catcher and Inca Terns were seen in quantities in the Straits. In the Gulf of Penas most of the same birds appeared and, in addition, Pintado Petrels were very numerous, Giant Petrels (*M. giganteus*) and Brown Petrel (*A. cinereus*) and about 30 Goulds Petrel (*H. leucopterus*). This valuable list closes with a single Royal Albatross (*D. epomophora*).

Gibbs made the best of a chance of bird study which seldom comes ones way.

Lieutenant M. N. Walton, R.N. of H.M.S. "Roebuck" sends us a series of reports of a voyage from Londonderry to Bermuda, exercises off Bermuda and return to Devonport.

In all 40 observations, very carefully recorded with amplifying notes. The most outstanding record is of 5 Magnificent Frigate Birds (*F. magnificens*) on 4th June, 1956 in 48.18°N, 38.30W. This is no doubt an unusually Northerly record being the latitude of Newfoundland. The birds were flying N.W. at 100 ft. He also reports a Great Frigate Bird (*F. minor*), an adult female, in 34.20°N, 61.51°W, well to N.E. of Bermuda. It is difficult to accept this identification, as in that position the bird is almost certainly *magnificens*.

Another interesting record is on 4th June, 1956 of Great Shearwaters (*P. gravis*) and British Storm Petrels travelling N.W. in great numbers. He says "In mid Altantic, in early June, the bird population was surprisingly high, but the birds were not travelling in any particular direction. However as we approached the Labrador Current we became very much aware of the migration North Westwards of Great Shearwaters and Storm Petrels. This was most interesting to me as I had witnessed the same migration of Great Shearwaters, but 21° further South, when in H.M.S. "Newcastle" in June, 1954." The Storm Petrels were crossing the ship's wake at the rate of 3 or 4 a minute, and Shearwaters in flocks of 10 to 20.

He admits doubt as to the identity of some of the Storm Petrels, and we suggest that those seen migrating N.W. in such numbers and so far West were probably Wilson's.

Captain T. S. Graham, S.S. "Laurentia" reports a voyage from Glasgow to Montreal in Oct. 1955. This mainly corroborates previous reports. On his next voyage—Liverpool to U.S. West Coast Ports he notes birds in various West Coast Rivers and Puget Sound, mainly the expected ducks, geese, gulls, etc. Between San Francisco and San Pedro several Cassin's Auklet (*Ptychoramphus aleuticus*) landed on board; also an Ashy Petrel (*O. homochroa*). These all "had to be launched before taking flight." He sketched a bird off the Mexican coast which is obviously a Blue-faced Booby. A sketch made in the Caribbean in 13.10°N, 67.47°W was easily recognised as a Red-footed Booby in intermediate plumage, with a white tail. These notes were included in a weather report to the Meteorological Office.

Capt. G. Craze, M.V. "King Robert" reports:—"11th Feb., clearing Spencer Gulf, numerous young Albatross (species not stated) in company. On 16th Feb. in 35.28°S, 108.45°E number augmented by older birds, about 50 now following ship. All kept company till 19th Feb. in 32.16°S, 93.45°E when all but two left us. 20th Feb. all had departed."

Lieutenant Cdr. E. G. May, R.N. sends a record and coloured sketch of a bird, one of five which boarded R.F.A. "Eaglesdale" in the Southern end of the Red Sea. It has been identified as the Grey Headed Kingfisher (*Halcyon semicaerulea*), a bird of S.W. Arabia and Africa South to Zanzibar.

## OBSERVATIONS OF LAND BIRDS AT SEA

R.N.B.W.S. has been approached by the Editor of "British Birds" to furnish him with reports of Land Birds observed at sea.

He would like to receive reports from any part of the world, and is particularly interested in the North Atlantic. Not only will this form a very useful link between our Society and one of the leading authorities, but will ensure that data on the presence of land birds at sea will be made available for effectual study. The Editor of "British Birds" will help where identity is in doubt, and sketches, particularly coloured ones to supplement descriptions would assist.

In future therefore, members forwarding Sea Reports are asked to **put land birds on a SEPARATE sheet.**

Please include the following additional information:—

1. Wind—force and direction.
2. Visibility.
3. Position of ship where land birds first and last seen.
4. Period of stay if alighting.
5. Direction of approach and departure if known.
6. Any remarks on behaviour—was food taken, etc.

Such reports should be forwarded in the usual way to the Editor R.N.B.W.S.

It is hoped that members will co-operate in this aspect of Bird Watching at sea.

*Eight*



MONTAGU'S HARRIER.

*Sketched in the New Forest by C. E. H., 1956.*

## NOTES FROM HOME

### COMMON BUZZARD IN WEST SUSSEX.

On 29th January, 1956, a Common Buzzard was seen soaring at tree top level over the Downland woods at West Burton, near Arundel  
G.S.T.

### THE WILDBROOKS, AMBERLEY, WEST SUSSEX, DURING THE SEVERE WEATHER OF FEBRUARY, 1956.

During the middle of February thousands of Widgeon sought sanctuary in the Wildbrooks, that wide expanse of water meadow and marsh lying on either side of the river Arun as it winds its course from Pulborough southwards to Bury. The Wildbrooks looked bleak indeed, a frozen waste with here and there wide areas of cats' ice where erstwhile floods had been caught in the grip of winter. But the few running streams and deep sided spring-fed drains were still open. A walk along the river bank provided splendid views of widgeon. Rafts of duck were dotted all along the river, while large flocks of Widgeon could be seen feeding on the verges uncovered by the tidal range. The Widgeon drakes were in striking plumage. Teal in bunches, and Mallard, mostly in pairs sprang continuously from the shelter of the frosted reeds. In one sheltered bend of the river seven drake Tufted Duck disported themselves with four females with them; further on a pair of Great Crested Grebes swam and dived within a stone's throw of where I stood.

A water meadow behind a winter flood bank was studded with blue grey shapes, over 300 pigeons, whilst 20 or 30 Coot waddled amongst them. Nearer on the same meadow some 40 Widgeon were feeding in line. Snipe sprang from the bottom of the drains. Several Cormorants were feeding in the river; it was clear that most of these birds had left the frozen estuaries for the greater shelter of the "Brooks."

There are always several herds of Mute Swans on the Brooks and one rarely has to wait long before seeing them on the wing. Looking back over this wintry scene as I climbed to the stubble fields I could see eight of them flying above the river, and never have swans looked whiter than on this occasion silhouetted against a background of leaden snow clouds.

G.S.T.

### LITTLE RINGED PLOVER IN SURREY.

Encouraged and accompanied by an enthusiastic schoolboy, two septuagenarian members of the R.N.B.W.S. visited a sewage works in the South of England in May.

Enjoying the salubrious ozone were a number of Redshanks and Peewits, Green Sandpipers and a pair of Lesser Black-backed Gulls. The visitors had the luck to get good views of two pairs of Little Ringed Plovers, the main object of their visit.

By this time, however, the old gentlemen were so overcome by the nauseous fumes that they would have accepted with perfunctory interest the presence of a Pheasant-tailed Jacana or a Andalusian Hemipode !

The following day one of these veterans had the unexpected joy of hearing the music of breeding Curlews on a Surrey Common.

C.E.H.

#### AN INLAND RINGING STATION.

A new member, J. O. Brinkley, has recently been helping at the Romford Ringing Station, Essex. The Station came into being in 1954, and has already ringed over 11,000 Starlings and well over 1,000 other birds of 50 species. The majority of the Starlings ringed have been juveniles. There have been many recoveries notified from Eire to Russia.

The equipment includes two fine nylon "mist" nets, and Swedish Wader traps.

#### BIRD PROTECTION BY THE ARMY.

A report reaches us of an interesting plan which is carried out at an Infantry Training School in the South of England. Whenever a lark's nest is found on the training area they ring it with a circle of white tape. These circles are avoided as far as possible and many nests have been saved. A useful bit of bird protection which might be extended.



BLUE-FACED BOOBY—KURIA MURIA ISLANDS, COAST OF OMAN.

*Photograph by Lt.-Cdr. A. C. F. David, R.N.*

## NOTES FROM ABROAD

### THE COTO de DONANA.

A valuable report comes from Lieutenant M. B. Casement, R.N., of a visit to this area of S.W. Spain.

This took place in October, which is not the time generally chosen by ornithologists to visit the Marismas. His list of birds identified is extensive, comprising about 80 species. It includes several lucky prizes such as Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*), Spanish Imperial Eagle (*A. heliaco adalberti*), Pintailed Sandgrouse (*P. alchata*), White-headed Duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*).

On the other hand several birds come to mind which are usually features of any expedition to S. Spain and which appear to have been absent. For instance Bonelli's Eagle, Neophron, Blue Rock Thrush, and Larks.

Casement mentions only Skylark, and saw only one, in spite as he says of looking out for other species. This is strange as in the arable lands of Southern Spain larks swarm, including Calandra (*M. calandra*), Skylark, Short-toed (*calandrella brachydactyla*), whilst the whistle of the Crested (*Galerida cristata*) is with one on every walk.

We quote in full a note on a visit to a heronry which is of particular interest:—

“27th October, 1955. Excursion to see the heronry. About 25,000 pairs of birds nest there including Buff-backed Heron, Little Egret, Night Heron, and Squacco Heron.

The colony looks like a vast garden rubbish heap; nests crowd each other and are hardly separated.

Apparently all species nest together and not isolated species for species.

A common Heronry is nearby in some oaks, and also a White Stork's nest.

Purple Herons nest in the reed beds near Sopeton.”

### SOME BIRD NOTES DURING A FISHING TRIP IN ICELAND.

Admiral Sir William Tennant sends the following interesting note of some birds met recently in Iceland during a fishing trip:—

“The river we were fishing was the Thvera about 60 miles N.E. from Birkaness. The party I joined had just completed a tour in a Landrover across the island, and I must borrow from them the Barrows Goldeneye and the Red-necked Phalarope, both of which they had met in the vicinity of Myvatyn and I was not lucky enough to see either of them.

On my way out from Reykjavik we suddenly saw some tall waders in a grass field alongside the road. We stopped and got out to find about thirty Black-tailed Godwits in summer plumage.

They looked magnificent in their almost chestnut coloured neck and breast, and were very tame as all the birds in Iceland seemed to be.

The bottom of our long beat of the river was a very bushy scrubby area, and some of the party camping here were kept awake by the monotonous song of the Fieldfare—a poor musical effort for the thrush tribe, and not much more ambitious than the Corn Bunting.

On our ride up to the hut we were at once struck by the numbers of Whimbrel and Golden Plover; in all this area, and it was a large one, they seemed to be the commonest and tamest of the birds. Dunlin were there, looking very smart with their coal black bellies; also Ringed Plover and Redshanks, but not in any great numbers.

Quite one of the most attractive birds seen was the Purple Sandpiper, and if she had young about she would do the broken wing trick within a few feet of you.

In July if the night is cloudless it is quite easy to read all night. One night I was awake and between 1.30 and 2.30 a.m. I heard a bird sing—a musical and short song new to me—it turned out to be a Golden Plover—we heard them sing at no other time.

Snow Buntings were fairly plentiful and we saw one cock—true it was not so very far from snow capped mountains—in almost white plumage, and very smart and gay he looked and an easy prey for a Merlin.

I saw a Merlin swoop one day amongst the Golden Plover, and the screams were heartrending.

The only other bird of particular interest we found breeding near our river, and ridiculously tame, was the Ptarmigan. With a nest of young nearby one could almost touch the parent with the tip of the salmon rod. The cock occasionally uttered the weirdest of noises, and I can only liken it to a wooden ratchet slipping in a wooden socket.

We saw about half a dozen Whooper Swans and they were less approachable than the rest of the bird world.

Unfortunately I was not in the Island long enough to sight its great Falcon or the Snowy Owl, but the birds we did see just rounded off a very enjoyable fishing trip."

#### EMPEROR PENGUIN ROOKERY.

Early in May, 1956, Surgeon Lieutenant Cdr. D. G. Dalgleish, leader of the Royal Society's I.G.Y. Base at Halley Bay on the Weddell Sea coast of Antarctica, signalled that ten thousand Emperor Penguins had walked ashore and established a nesting rookery about half a mile from the base. Later messages stated that more Penguins were still coming ashore, and that he had recorded the noise in the rookery with a tape recorder.

The Emperor Penguin incubates its egg during the Artic winter. Incubation is carried out by the male bird, the egg being balanced



on top of the webbed feet and covered by a pouch of skin. Throughout the 65 to 70 days of incubation the male can take no food, and has to endure the fierce blizzards of winter in temperatures as low as minus 70°F. Meantime the females leave the rookery to live and feed in the open water far from the rookery, returning as the eggs are chipping.

#### FURTHER NOTES FROM THE KURIA MURIA ISLANDS—COAST OF OMAN.

The photograph of the Blue-faced Booby in this issue was taken by Lieutenant Commander A. C. F. David, of H.M.S. "Cook" in 1954. On 9th April, 1954, he found 500 pairs with eggs and young on Quibliza Island, and many Red-billed Tropic Birds in the vicinity. So far as is known the only published report of birds on these islands dates back to a record by Von Heughin, about 1870, when he notes Terns, Noddies, Tropic Birds and Ganets on Socotra and the Kuria Muria Islands.

## SOUTH SANDWICH ISLANDS—BIRD LIFE

The following letter received from the Admiralty formed an appendix to a report of proceedings from Captain J. Wilkinson, D.S.C., G.M., R.N., of H.M.S. "Protector."

It is printed in full owing to its outstanding interest as a record of birds in a remote group of Islands which have probably seldom been visited by a competent ornithologist.

EDITOR.

15th—19th March, 1956.

A watch was kept during the daylight hours when in the vicinity of the various islands in the group to note approximate numbers of the different species of birds sighted. The watchers were a volunteer team from the ship's company and the book of reference used is Murphy's "Oceanic Birds of South America."

(a) **The Southern Thule Group (Thule, Cook and Bellinghausen Islands).**

The Silver Grey Fulmar (*Priocella antarctica*) was by far the most numerous species. There were always 10 or 12 round the ship and at times, when close inshore, the numbers must have been well over 100. The Cape Pigeon (*Daption capensis*) was also present in considerable numbers. 6—10 near the ship with increased numbers nearer the Islands. Usually 4 or 5 Wilson's Petrels (*Oceanites oceanicus*) could be seen, following the ship. Prions (*genus Pachyptila*) were seen in small numbers (up to 4) but particular species cannot be distinguished at sea. Other birds seen in small numbers included the Light Mantled Sooty Albatross (*Phoebastria palpebrata*) 1—4; Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans exulans*), many Black-browed Albatross (*Diomedea melanophrys*) and possibly (*Diomedea chororhynchos*) 1—2 and Grey-headed Albatross (*Diomedea chrysostomia*); Brown or South Polar Skua (*Catharacta skua lonnbergi*) or (*Catheracta skua maccormicki*) 1—4; Black-bellied Storm Petrels (*Fregetta tropica*) 1—6 but more numerous on one occasion and the Giant Petrel (*Macronectes giganteus*) 1—3 in its dark phase. Penguins were seen ashore on Thule in the rookery at the head of Ferguson Bay which included Ringed (*Pygoscelis antarctica*) about a 1,000 or more and Gentoo (*Pygoscelis papua*) about 30—40.

(b) **Bristol Island.**

Here the Cape Pigeons probably outnumber the Silver Grey Petrels, about 200—250 of the former and 150—200 of the latter being sighted. Two colonies of Silver Grey Petrels were seen from the Helicopter, one at Harker Point and one at Wilson Rock, the latter containing many thousands of birds. The ship was invaded by a flock of 30—40 Antarctic Blue-eyed Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax atriceps*) which landed on the focsle, and as "Discovery" in 1930 suffered the same attentions, there must be a colony on Bristol Island. About 4 Kelp Gulls (*Larus dominicanus*) were seen. A single Wandering Albatross (*Diomedea exulans*) and the usual small bevy of Wilsons Petrels were following the ship. One Penguin rookery was seen on the South West coast containing probably Gentoo numbering about 100.

(c) **Montagu Island.**

Great numbers (up to 500) of Silver Grey Fulmar were sighted on the cliff face on the east side of Allen Point and many thousands more on the west side. About 30 Cape Pigeon, 25 Wilsons Petrels, Kelp Gulls and 2 Brown or South Polar Skua were seen. Groups of Ringed Penguins were seen in the water round the ship and probably totalled 100—150. No Penguin rookeries were sighted from the Helicopter.

(d) **Saunders Island.**

Fewer birds were seen near Saunders Island, perhaps because it was actually volcanic. There were about 50 Cape Pigeon, a dozen Silver Grey Fulmar, about 6 Black-bellied Storm Petrel and two Wandering Albatross. Three Terns, probably Swallow-tailed (*Sterna vittata*) were seen. Penguins were seen in rookeries ashore. There are probably five main rookeries, two on the cliffs and three on the tops and sides of the extinct craters near Cordelia Bay. Principal species were Ringed with probably 500—600 in each rookery. One Macaroni (*Eudyptes chrysolophus*) was conspicuous amongst them.

(e) **Vindication Island.**

Again the Cape Pigeon and the Silver Grey Fulmar were seen in considerable numbers (100—200), Giant Petrel (about 20) and Southern Black-backed Gull (about 10) were seen and Prions, Wandering Albatross, Sooty Albatross and White-chinned Petrel (*Procellaria aequinoctialis*) were sighted in small numbers (1—4). Groups of Ringed Penguin were again observed in the water. No Penguins were identified ashore.

(f) **Visokio Island.**

Cape Pigeon and Silver Grey Fulmar again predominated (100—200) round the ship, many thousands of these species flew out from the cliffs above Low Point as the Helicopter passed. Giant Petrel, Kelp Gull, Wandering Albatross and Prions were sighted in small numbers —(16) and there was the usual following of Wilson's Petrels (up to 30). Groups of up to 20 Gentoo and Ringed Penguins were seen in the water round the ship. There were four Penguin rookeries at Low Point, on cliffs above Low Point up to as high as 1,000 ft., at Penguin Point and Finger Point. Landing at Finger Point showed that 99% of the many thousands there were Ringed with some Gentoo and a small party of 6—10 Macaroni.

(g) **Zavodovski Island.**

This was passed in the late evening and no observations were made. The ship did not visit Leskov Island.

## FARLINGTON MARSHES

By Capt. PETER SMITH, Royal Marines.

For anyone who is interested in birds and who find themselves in Portsmouth with time hanging on their hands I can suggest no better afternoon's outing than to catch a bus from the Main gate of the Dockyard to Farlington. The bus goes out past the airfield to the bridge which carries the eastern bypass on to the mainland. If you get off the bus on the bridge you will find a rough track signposted "Car Park" on the mainland side, walk down the track to the gate and you will be on the marsh.

The first route I would recommend, especially if the tide is high, is to follow the sea wall round to the "Lagoon." Sitting on the sea wall you command a view of the pool and many of the patches of mud favoured by the migrants. If you draw a blank here, and providing that you have Wellingtons (you can do quite a lot without them, but it means hopping from tussock to tussock) make your way along the stream that feeds the pool and you will stand a fair chance of flushing duck or waders. In the last two years birds seen here include Gadwell, Garganey, Yellowshank, Dotterel, Grey Phalarope, Osprey, a Black-eared Wheatear and much else.

If it is high tide follow the sea wall and stop on the Point opposite the island with the ruins of a house. This serves as a grandstand at about an hour after high tide as hundreds of waders move from the islands to the feeding grounds on the west side of Langston Harbour. At high tide duck and grebe come up the channel and in winter time the Short-eared Owls are usually around at dusk, tho' they sometimes hunt by day as well.

If the tide is low it is worthwhile going on past the blockhouse and out via North Biness Island to the top of Long Island, but Wellingtons are essential here and the channels are only open to those on foot for about three hours either side of low water. Out on the end of Long Island, which can be bitterly cold, is the best place to watch Merganser, Goldeneye, Grebes, and, if you are lucky, the occasional Diver or Smew.

Either here or at the Point are the usual meeting places for other birdwatchers—it is very seldom that one is the only person out on the marsh, especially at week-ends, and one can often get news of rare migrants.

You can go still further if you wish and cross the channel to the next island to the south, a channel that seldom dries out. However, the island does sometimes reward one with a good view of the Brent.

Another good area, especially for Mallard, is up Bedminster Creek, but so far I have never got around to going there myself as my own area takes quite a lot of time to cover properly and seems to produce more variety. You can reach the Creek by following on the sea wall past North Biness.

The whole area is haunted by "the monstrous regiment of shorepoppers and titshooters" as Col. Hawker described them, but on the whole their activities help to keep the birds on the move and give one a better chance of seeing everything in the harbour. Nevertheless it is annoying to see Merganser being slaughtered from ignorance and even more so, when as happened to me, one is nearly included in the bag! Fortunately the local people have done much to keep the shooting in proper season and to warn "sportsmen" of rare birds to be left in peace.

"Dull days" are possible, but rare. In winter there are always Waders, Diving Duck and the Brent, whilst in Spring and Autumn one literally never knows what will turn up at the "Lagoon." Even the summer months are full of interest with breeding Shelduck, summering Black-tailed Godwit, and Yellow Wagtails. There is always the feeling that perhaps something new is waiting in those reedbeds, or that any day the wintering birds I love may be returning, which, to me at any rate, gives Farlington a never ending fascination.

# MIGRATIONS OF THE SOOTY SHEARWATER

By W. R. P. BOURNE, M.B.O.U.

The Sooty Shearwater (*Puffinus griseus*) (Gmelin) is the largest and commonest of the dark shearwaters, and may be recognised at sea by its heavy body with a short, rounded tail and long, slender wings which are held straight and stiff in flight, its uniform grey colour with a long slender dark bill and characteristic pale underwing coverts, and its characteristic wheeling flight low over the water with alternate spells of flapping and gliding. It has an extraordinarily extensive range at sea, its migrations covering all the oceans with the possible exception of the northern Indian Ocean, and since its movements are now perhaps as well known as those of any sea-bird it may be of interest if I discuss them briefly and suggest the way in which they may have originated. Similar migrations are performed by many other sea-birds, including petrels, storm petrels, gulls, terns, skuas, auks, phalaropes, and gannets; so far too little is known about most of them, and I should like to emphasise here that the members of the Royal Naval Bird Watching Society are in an excellent position to study them. Some of the Society's sea reports already add very considerably to our knowledge of the distribution and movements of many sea-birds, and it seems likely that as they continue to accumulate they will make an exceedingly important contribution to the development of the science of marine ornithology.

The Sooty Shearwater is one of a group of five large migratory shearwaters which breed in different parts of the Southern Ocean and make similar migrations north to different parts of northern seas. All five species appear to be closely related, but the group as a whole appears to be composed of two distinct "superspecies" each composed of related species characteristic of the same zone of surface water, the three "Great Shearwaters" *Puffinus gravis*, *Puffinus carneipes* and *Puffinus creatopus* breeding in relatively low latitudes near the sub-tropical hydrological convergence at Tristan da Cunha and Gough Island, South-west Australia and in the Tasman Sea, Juan Fernandes and along the coast of Chile, while the two "Sooty Shearwaters" *Puffinus tenuirostris* and *Puffinus griseus* breed further south within the sub-antarctic zone around southern South America, New Zealand and Tasmania. The first four species have a relatively restricted range, migrating north in different segments of the world ocean; it seems likely that the Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus* may also have had a similar restricted range off the west coast of the Americas during the ice-ages, breeding in Chile and migrating north to Peru and California, but if this was so it has extended its range south since

the climate became warmer in recent times and it now occurs throughout the Southern Ocean in summer, migrating north to winter throughout the equivalent zone of northern seas.

At the present day it is the large dark shearwater characteristic of the sub-antarctic zone of the Southern Ocean between roughly  $45^{\circ}$  and  $60^{\circ}$  S. There are enormous breeding colonies holding many millions of pairs around the southern extremities of South America and New Zealand where they extend into this zone, while a few birds breed in the outer colonies of the very closely related Short-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus tenuirostris*) off Tasmania and south-east Australia. There are no colonies off the other southern land masses, western Australia and South Africa, which do not extend so far south, but many birds occur at sea south of Kerguelen in the Southern Indian Ocean, and it seems quite likely that a colony may be established in this region in the future although none have been found there yet. The annual cycle at the breeding stations has been investigated by Richdale, who has shown that the birds first start to visit the burrows in mid September, lay one egg about November 21st, hatch it in late January and desert the breeding station and the more backward young in mid April. The breeding birds feed at sea for some hundreds of miles around the breeding sites, and large numbers of non-breeding birds occur at sea throughout the Southern Ocean during the breeding season, large flocks collecting off the pack-ice of Antarctica in high summer;

it seems likely that these are young birds which do not start to come to land until they are five years old. There are large confused movements throughout the Southern Ocean during the summer whose precise significance is obscure; the most remarkable is a marked westerly movement along the edge of the pack-ice of the Indian Antarctic shortly after midsummer which may possibly include non-breeding birds from the New Zealand area moving west to feed in the rich waters south of Kerguelen, where there are no resident shearwaters.

After mid April the greater part of the population deserts the Southern Ocean and moves north for the winter. Comparatively little is known about the movements of the species in the southern hemisphere, but it is clear that some birds, possibly the young of the year, remain south of the equator throughout the winter, moving north-east from the breeding sites to winter in the cool current areas in low latitudes off Peru and south-west Africa, which may have a seasonal increase in plankton during the winter. These birds probably reach their wintering grounds in the west wind zone, move north during the winter, and return to the breeding sites in the south-east trades. The remainder of the population must move north very fast after the end of the breeding season,

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because three groups of birds which may possibly derive from the three distinct breeding colonies in Australasia and on opposite sides of South America move north along the coasts of Japan, California, and New England in late April and early May and disperse at sea off the Kuriles, British Columbia, and Newfoundland in late May. During the northern summer the species becomes widespread at sea in the northern west wind zone between roughly  $45^{\circ}$  and  $60^{\circ}$  N., the birds gradually drifting east with the prevailing wind after midsummer to accumulate in the waters off British Columbia and Western Europe in July and August. There is a marked southwards movement down the coasts of California and West Africa in September, and the birds must return straight home through the trades since they arrive at the breeding stations immediately afterwards.

The Sooty Shearwater appears to be primarily an offshore species which is commonest near the continental coasts and the Antarctic pack-ice although very widespread in small numbers at sea. It appears to have developed its truly immense migrations by passively making use of the prevailing winds of different parts of the oceans in the manner of a sailing ship. It seems rather likely that the non-breeding birds found in the far south in summer make use of the circumpolar belts of easterly and westerly winds in high latitude to move backwards and forwards around the Southern Ocean; it is clear that in winter different populations migrate north around the anticyclones which are normally present in the centres of more northern seas in middle latitudes in such a way that they are assisted by following winds throughout their passage. By using the prevailing winds in this way the birds are able to exploit the rich feeding grounds of the high latitudes of the opposite hemispheres at the time when the food supply is best, in high summer, leaving them when it is poorer, in winter. This transequatorial migration has been extraordinarily successful, and as a result the Sooty Shearwater is one of the most abundant and widespread birds of its size in the world.

## REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

### MIGRATION OF CHAFFINCHES.

Major R. F. Rutledge of "Cloonce," Balinrobe, Co. Mayo, Ireland, is hoping that R.N.B.W.S. members may be able to provide information to throw light on an apparently local immigration of Chaffinches at the end of October and early in November in most years. This is a continuing investigation and members in the Merchant Navy on passage round the north of Ireland should be well placed to help in the future.

Major Rutledge writes:— "At the end of October and early November in most years a marked immigration of Chaffinches moves across Co. Mayo from N.W. to S.E.

Observations off N.W. Mayo indicate an arrival of birds from seaward from North and North-west. The curious thing is that this movement does not seem to be noticed, if at all, on the Co. Donegal coast. The movement is most noticeable in periods of east and south-east winds."

Are these birds which make a landfall after departure from perhaps the Hebrides and the Flannans?

Are these birds from Scandinavia which have drifted across Scotland? If they do cross to Ireland from say Islay or the Mull of Kintyre they could have originated from Scandinavia or the North Western European coast.

To assist in discovering the origin of this movement members operating in the North Channel, or anywhere on the approximate line Hebrides to Erris Head (Co. Mayo) are asked to forward to Major Rutledge records of Chaffinches showing dates, numbers, direction of flight, position of ship, and weather conditions during October and November.

If any male Chaffinch should be picked up dead please preserve lightly by injection of Formalin in belly and swab in throat, and forward to him without delay.

Marked migrations of other land birds towards Ireland are of great interest to Major Rutledge.

## BOOKS

ROCKALL by JAMES FISHER. (*Geoffrey Bles, London.—18s.*)

A book of absorbing interest comprising the history of the Rock from the earliest records until the formal taking of possession on 18th September, 1955, which was attended by the author.

Scientific details are included.

From the Bird Watchers point of view it is clear that one can see the same birds in greater quantities in more accessible places.

*Editor.*

### THE ORNITHOLOGISTS' GUIDE.

(Compiled by the British Ornithologists' Union. H. F. & G. Witherby Ltd., 5, Warwick Court, London, W.C.1. Price 21s., plus postage 1/6d. Just published).

The individual bird watcher may sometimes wonder in what way he can best make use of his opportunities, what particular aspect of bird study lends itself to his particular surroundings, and on what lines he should work.

This book has been compiled to answer these questions. Forty-four of the most eminent ornithologists of today have combined to write in a clear simple manner on a range of subjects covering over sixty different aspects of bird study.

To quote at random from some of the sections covered we find field recognition, plumage, observing birds on passage, bird behaviour, fighting and threat, song, roosting, parental care, skinning and preserving, apparatus, suggestions for special study, etc.

There is a section for overseas bird watchers, giving data on local contacts, museums, books, etc., and another section on bird reserves in Britain and Europe.

The "Guide" is crammed with authoritative and interesting information.

*Editor.*

## NEW MEMBERS — 1956

|                      |                                                   |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
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# R.N.B.W.S. REFERENCE BOOK LIST

(REVISED 1954)

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|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
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| AREA.                            | TITLE.                                                            | AUTHOR.            | PUBLISHER.                                                                             |
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| MALAYA,<br>SINGAPORE,<br>PENANG. | <i>The Birds of the Malay Peninsula, Singapore and Hong Kong.</i> | A. G. Glenistor.   | 35/-.                                                                                  |
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